

Site No. 8

SAKONNET POINT

Little Compton
State Route 77 (Sakonnet Point Road)



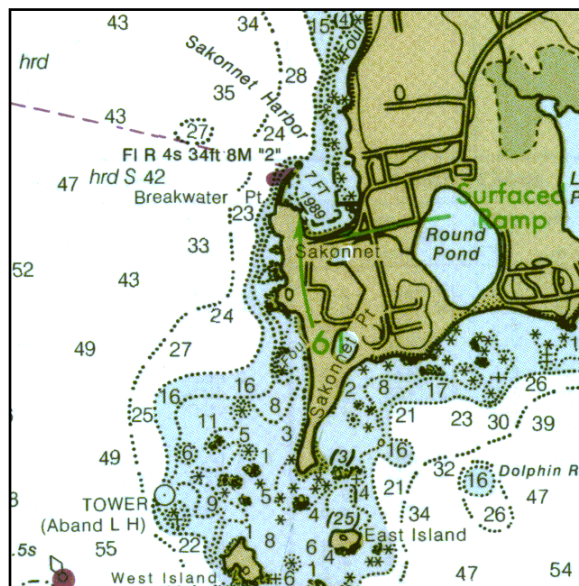
SAKONNET POINT

Site Description

The Sakonnet Point site is located along Sakonnet Harbor at the southwesterly point of Little Compton. Supporting both commercial fisheries and recreational boating/sailing uses, the most prominent feature of the site is a long south-to-north stone breakwater which defines the harbor. This federally-owned breakwater was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is typically used by recreational anglers to access the quality fishing offered by waters in this area. Marina facilities along the harbor side of the breakwater are under redevelopment, with heavy marine construction currently taking place.

Location Assessment

Bay Location. Sakonnet Point and Sakonnet Harbor are located along Rhode Island Sound at the mouth of the Sakonnet River. The Little Compton coast in this area is characterized by a hard rocky shoreline extending from Sakonnet Point proper to the Breakwater Point (see nautical chart image, Photo 8). From the Online Recreational Fishing Survey, typical catch in the Sakonnet Point vicinity consists primarily of Striped Bass (spring - fall), with Bluefish, Summer Flounder, Tautog, and Scup also (but less frequently) reported. Though not assessed for aquatic life support use in the *State of the State's Waters Report*, waters in the vicinity of the site are open to shellfishing and are classified a water quality goal of SA (high quality) by the RIDEM (see Appendix B).



Water uses in the area are centered around the Sakonnet Harbor, which is host to a mixture of private and municipally-owned recreational and commercial uses. Major facilities in the Harbor include a commercial fisheries marina, a town marina, and the Sakonnet Yacht Club. Marina facilities along the westerly side of the harbor are currently under construction (see Photos 2-4), and a private recreation club and marina (the Sakonnet Point Club) will be developed in this area in the near future (Photo 6). A RIDEM boat launch (and accessory boat trailer parking area) offers public boating access along the south shore of the harbor (Photo 1), and the Sakonnet Yacht Club also supports light recreational boating and sailing in the area (Photo 7). Though more ambitious anglers sometimes fish from the rocks along the westerly shoreline, recreational fishing at the site is conducted primarily along the Army Corps breakwater at the end of Bluff Head Road.

Land Location. The site is located at the terminus of State Route 77 (Sakonnet Point Road) in Little Compton. Along with Tiverton, Little Compton is geographically separated from the rest of the State by the Sakonnet River and is renowned for its small-town character, pastoral aesthetics, and vineyards. Beyond the aforementioned public and private harbor uses, land use in the vicinity is primarily rural/residential, and the Sakonnet Golf Club is approximately ½ mile north of the site along Route 77. As it is fairly removed from regional population centers

(Providence, Fall River), local residents of Tiverton, Little Compton, and nearby Massachusetts communities most likely comprise the majority of the user base.

Environmental Constraints and Permitting. At the end of Bluff Head Avenue, a manmade stone breakwater currently serves as the de-facto fishing structure at the site. The coastal features of the site consist of this stone breakwater, a small stretch of rip rap shoreline at the head of the breakwater, and the natural rocky shoreline along the westerly coast. Eel grass is documented in the project vicinity on the eastern side of the stone jetty, however it is unlikely that any eel grass beds are located on the ocean side of this structure.

Within Sakonnet Harbor, waters are classified by the CRMC as Type 2 (Low-Intensity Use) and Type 5 (Commercial and Recreational Harbors). Immediately beyond the harbor, waters along the coastline of Little Compton are classified as Type 1 (Conservation Area). Any proposed fishing structure development in Type 1 waters would require a Special Exception request (requiring the applicant to demonstrate compelling public benefit, etc.), as such activities are normally prohibited in these waters.

Facilities Assessment

At over 700 feet in length, the existing stone breakwater currently offers ample frontage to quality recreational fishing along its ocean side. The major limitation inherent in this structure is lack of equitable access, as there are no viable fishing spots at the site for persons with disabilities, and the breakwater may be difficult to access by children and elderly persons due to the irregular footing along the rocks (particularly at the head of the breakwater ,see Photo 2). The ongoing marine construction immediately inside the breakwater (Photos 2, 3) currently requires users of the breakwater to walk along a longer stretch of uneven stone rip rap to bypass this work. With the exception of a single portable toilet (most likely serving the ongoing construction) and a trash receptacle, the site offers virtually no public use amenities. The breakwater itself also does not appear to be maintained, as it is characterized by a high amount of litter between the rocks along its length (Photo 5).

Public parking at the site is most readily offered by a small paved parking area on a generally unimproved parcel near the head of the breakwater (see Photo 4A). While research indicates that this parcel is privately owned, it was observed to be used for public parking and currently offers space for approximately 15 vehicles. Immediately south of this parking area, portions of the lot are used as stockpiling areas for the ongoing construction work (Photo 4B). Parking is also possible in certain poorly-defined locations elsewhere along harbor roads, however several lots are posted for private use only. The lot at the RIDEM boat ramp is designated for use only by vehicles with boat trailers.

Existing Site Conditions

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Existing Fishing Facilities			X	
Parking		X		
Compatibility with Surrounding Land / Water Uses			X	
Statewide Transportation Accessibility / Public Transit	X			
Site Aesthetics		X		
	Low	Medium	High	
Water Quality (see Appendix B)			X	

Priority for Capital Improvements: Low

Notwithstanding the above-noted access limitations, the existing stone breakwater currently serves as a quality recreational fishing structure. While ease of access to this facility could be improved upon, the development of handicap accessibility to this structure would necessitate widening of the breakwater cross-section, installation of concrete deck slabs, railing, etc. which, if physically possible, would likely be cost-prohibitive. The physical and regulatory constraints of the site also limit the potential for additional structure, as development along the ocean side is not feasible due to the rocky shoreline and Type 1 waters. Considering the geographically removed location of Sakonnet Point in relation to the rest of the State, major capital improvements to this site would only benefit a small portion of Rhode Island's population.

Of relevance to future public accessibility of the site is the proposed development of the Sakonnet Point Club, a private recreation facility to be constructed along the harbor on the easterly Bluff Head Avenue (see Photo 6). As part of the CRMC Assent Application for this project, the applicant is required to develop a Public Access Plan for the site in accordance with Section 335 of the *Coastal Resources Management Program*. Site-specific required elements of this plan include (a) maintaining public access to the existing Army Corps breakwater and (b) providing a minimum of 6 dedicated parking spaces for public use.

In the consideration of the elements to be developed as part of the Public Access Plan, certain low-priority minor improvements could potentially be implemented to enhance public use and enjoyment of the site, such as the provision of additional public parking (beyond the 6 spaces required) and public restrooms. The implementation of either would be contingent upon the availability of landside area in the vicinity of the breakwater, though most properties along Bluff Head Avenue are privately owned (including the parcel currently used for public parking). As previously noted, the aesthetic quality of the breakwater is currently marred by a high amount of litter along its length. It may be worthwhile to consider maintaining this structure through an adopt-a-spot program, possibly by a recreational fishing organization or other local interest.



Photo 1. RIDEM-managed boat launch at Sakonnet Harbor. A small boat-trailer-only parking lot is located directly across the street.



Photo 2. Looking northeast from start of breakwater / end of Bluff Head Avenue. Both recreational sailing (left) and marine construction (foreground right) are visible.



Photo 3. Looking back (southwest) along breakwater. Marina facilities are currently undergoing reconstruction.



Photos 4A and 4B. Lot along westerly shoreline near breakwater, currently used for public parking (4A) and material stockpiling (4B)



Photo 5. Typical litter condition along breakwater.



Photo 6. Marina facilities along Bluff Head Avenue. Parking in the foreground lot is posted for marina use only; the future site of the Sakonnet Point Club is in the background.



Photo 7. Sakonnet Harbor looking northwest. The dock and floats in the foreground are used by the Sakonnet Yacht Club.



Photo 8. Westerly shoreline of Sakonnet Point looking south. The rocky shoreline limits the potential for structural development along this coast.